

## Bittles' Magazine | Interview

Have you ever cried while listening to an album? And I don't mean shedding the odd fickle tear! What I mean is, have you ever been playing a record when all of a sudden it gets too much for you and you find yourself racked with heart-wrenching sobs? Even after decades of loving music I can list on one hand the songs that have had such an emotional impact on me. The reason for this isn't just that I am a tough as nails Irish man! No, it also has to do with the fact that the vast majority of music isn't actually about anything that could move you in any way. Either that or it is filled with such overly emoted sentimental platitudes that it leaves you merely with a feeling of mild distaste. **By JOHN BITTLES**



So, when you do discover a singer or artist whose music is able to touch the listener and drag them kicking and screaming into their own little world it marks them out as being someone to both cherish and adore.

While listening to *The Disappearance of the Girl*, the debut album by London-based singer/songwriter/producer/director **Phildel** I found myself with salty tears in my eyes and a long forgotten pain working its way up from my gut. The song that committed this misdeed upon my emotional wellbeing was *Dare*, an exquisitely beautiful piano and vocal piece that seems to hang in the air like some despondent angel who still hasn't given up on love. The delight of the album is that *Dare* is but one of the many tracks it contains that are somehow able to reach out through the empty void of everyday life and gently caress your soul.

The twelve tracks on the album are by turns charming, ethereal, haunting and emotionally surreal. Songs such as *Moonsea* and *Beside You* almost make time itself appear to stand still and have been proven by a top team of failed scientists to be able to cause even the most hard-hearted to fall into a romantic swoon. I was recently being targeted by an unruly mob of upset **Bastille** fans hungry for my blood after a particularly scathing review. Thinking on my feet I played them *Union Stone* and instead of beating me to a pulp as they intended

we all became firm friends.

**Phildel's** work contains a genuine heartfelt yearning that stirs the mind of the listener as well as the heart. Imagine the **Cocteau Twins** with emotional resonance and you aren't that far away from how the record sounds. Opening with the luscious strings and stunning voice of title track *The Disappearance of the Girl* the album doesn't once let up over its twelve gently mesmerising songs. And like all great records it has the power to remove you from yourself whether you are on a train, at home, or simply walking the dog. It manages to transport you to **Phildel's** world, a place of both glacial beauty and emotional pain. If that isn't enough to make you consider giving it a listen then I don't know what is.

In an intriguing interview we discussed the debut album, dance music, her upbringing, the beauty of sine waves and a whole lot more.

*Your album *The Disappearance of The Girl* has been getting rave reviews. Can you tell us a little bit about the record?*

The album took just under ten years to create - partly because I had a great deal I wanted to learn musically as I was creating it. I learnt how to arrange for string sections, I learnt something of programming and producing - and even how to build a synth from just a circuit board, an abandoned radio and a few components. Looking back, it's been quite a journey with a very steep learning curve.

*The title of the album is very evocative. Does it have a specific meaning to you?*

The album *The Disappearance of the Girl* was inspired by my up-bringing in many ways. At the age of 8 my parents divorced and my mother married a religious man who banned music and art from our house. I had a whole different culture and religion very much imposed upon me and I felt I had 'disappeared' from the liberal society and culture of my birth. To cope with the difficulties of living in these new conditions, I would often escape into the world of my own imagination - a positive disappearance. And so the album and all it explores through the songs, represents both disappearances in different ways.

*Dare seems to contain an aching yearning that melts the heart. Can you explain the idea behind the song?*

The song was actually written for my father, who has been the only real consistent support I've had throughout my life. He battled cancer and heart disease throughout much of my upbringing and the song is really based on a great fear of him leaving us. Luckily, he battled through and is still with us today - healthier than ever at the age of 73.

*Your music has been commissioned to a few commercials and TV soundtracks. Is this a good thing or a bad thing for an emerging artist?*

For me personally, it's been a good thing. The kind of music I create isn't the kind of music mainstream radio typically plays a great deal - at least not in the UK. And so advertising campaigns looking for a more creative sound to accompany a creative campaign are more likely to be the major platform that launches an artist like me into the public eye. I think increasingly advertising campaigns have a valid position in bringing certain types of music to the general public. There are amazing tracks by artists such as **Vangelis** and **Sigur Ros** - which I never would have heard if it hadn't been for the TV adverts I'd seen the tracks used on - as radio wouldn't have played that particular type of music. So there's something to be said for that.

*I would love to hear an epic trance version of Mistakes as I think the vocals would be huge in a club. Do you agree?*

Wow! I hadn't thought of that, I'm a massive fan of the club scene and funnily enough - although much of my own music doesn't tend to come out sounding like it, I love dance music and would say it's probably my favourite genre. If you (or anyone else) is up for creating a remix - I'd love to hear it!

*What was your first introduction to music?*

Going way back - I'd say nursery rhymes were my first introduction - as I guess is the case for many of us. I think the power of the nursery rhyme and fairytales/imagination and fantasy that we discover through music at the earlier age - is so important to expanding our imaginations and probably informs our musical ear more than we realise. Nursery rhymes go right back to the oral tradition of passing on song. Obviously at the age of eight I became more cut off from music so those earlier experiences of nursery rhymes and quite simplistic but very strong melodies was something I held on to.

*When did you realise that you wanted to make a career in the music business?*

Not until I was into my early twenties - I created music as soon as I ran away from home at seventeen but having lost so much time - I'd look at my friends who had learnt music or were confidently going on to do their degrees in music and I felt there was little chance for me. But things changed after I graduated with an English Literature degree and my homemade music demo fell into a friend's hands then was just passed on and on - leading to my music being used in its first advertising campaign - which was cinematically geared towards the concept of inspiration. From then I had European wide interest from music publishing companies, record labels and managers. Suddenly I had the funds to invest in high-end recording equipment and begin the process of learning, catching up for the lost ten years of my up-bringing.

*An article in The Observer claimed that you talk about song writing ›in terms of shape and colour‹. How important is the visual aspect in the creation of music?*

Yes, the visual aspect is completely how I create all of my musical arrangements. Once I understand the core of the song - its melody and lyric - I see in my imagination the kind of landscape the song is set in. I see characters, colours, weather, the land. And I set about arranging the musical parts in a way that I feel paints the picture musically. So if I see ethereal spirits, they're always represented by choirs. Some songs have speed and pace to them too - *Storm Song* is a gallop over a barren and stormy landscape. Some songs like *The Wolf* and *Holes In Your Coffin* are full of the energy of anger - they emerge feeling first like a menacing build and then erupt into a desperate chase.

*The Independent recently labelled your music as ›classical pop crossover songs‹. Do you think this is an adequate description of your music?*

I think I find genres generally difficult areas in relation to my music. Just because when I approach writing a song and arrangement, I only have one priority in mind and its serving the spirit of each individual song. So in order to do that, I find sounds from all across the musical board - electronic, orchestral etc. One publication mentioned »Dream-folk« and again, although I'm not strictly ›folk‹ - that's probably the most accurate term I've heard so far - as the music is always firmly routed in 'imagination' as opposed to real world subject matter.

*You have a remarkable stage presence when performing live. Do you think this is something that can be taught?*

Thank you, it feels natural to perform the songs in the way I do. I normally just improvise my way through everything physically as the mood takes me. The *Mistakes* music video was just a set of improvised movements I felt like performing to the song. I've never been taught anything in terms of performance but I do deeply enjoy being expressive through the use of my body. Regarding stage presence, I think the most important thing to teach people is to be free and confident in physically connecting themselves with the sentiment/underlying emotion/message of whatever art they're performing. When I see performers who do that (whether they are trained or not) it always brings about the most captivating result.

*Will you be playing in London again or in Germany anytime soon?*

We have a London date this December at St Giles in the Fields on 6th Dec. We're really hoping to start playing in Germany early next year - which I'm so excited about.



*You taught yourself how to produce music. In retrospect do you think this was a good way to learn?*

I think I could've saved a lot of time had I read the manual! (And I do read manuals more these days...).

It's a hard thing to answer - as producing can be such a creative thing - and I'd say about 50% of the great breakthroughs I've had - I've discovered by accident because I didn't really know what I was doing. I think if I'd been taught a step-by-step approach, I'd be less likely to experiment and would probably stick to the

routine I'd been taught more. Also, I don't believe you need a huge amount of production knowledge or equipment to create imaginative music. I think you just need to be able to use a small amount of equipment to its full potential. I was actually reading just the other day on a synth forum online - and people were arguing about what the best current synth on the market is. Then one person came on and basically said, if you knew about synths you could get any sound out of any synth. I thought that was an interesting point. Up until now, I've personally not been into synth presets - I absolutely adore working with sine waves in their purer form. What I find interesting about synths and how people approach them is how few people view the sine wave as the instrument sound - artists are often all about altering the actual sine wave as part of the art, in a way that you would rarely do to a violin or cello. For example people don't generally take a violin and place a whole bunch of effects on one - pretty much ignoring the original violin sound. And with synths - I like to focus on the purer sound of the sine wave without anything added to it - and just treat it like a violin, exploring the ways in which it can move from one note to the other - as sine waves are capable of beautiful glissandi (sliding action) between notes. Something that I proudly created for *Moonsea*.

*You also direct your own music videos. Would you consider directing a promo clip for anyone else? If so who would be your dream artist to work with?*

I really enjoyed directing the music videos - it was the closest I could get to showing the world of my imagination to others in that visual way. If I had more budget and more time - and probably more knowledge - I would do more ambitious things that I think would match my vision for the songs even closer. But for the moment, I'm happy with what I achieved through the videos. I view everything as a learning curve and I know I've created the best art and music I had the ability to create for when I created it. I look forward to raising the bar in future. In terms of other artists, perhaps in the future once I'm more experienced. I'm a big fan of the **Soap & Skin** music video for *Thanatos* - I would love to direct something really abstract yet raw for her.

*Do you agree that all great music should have an overlying air of mystery?*

This question makes me wonder whether I should delete all of my previous answers ...

I'm not sure - I can think of some great music which I love that doesn't have mystery to it. But, there is something about mystery that captures the unknown and mysterious natures of our own minds and existence in general - so in some ways, perhaps mystery in art brings us closer to the nature of our existence and we relate to art on a deeper level if it carries that mystery. I also think on a practical level, mystery is a beautiful thing to leave listeners with - as they get to fill in the gaps with their own imaginations/interpretations - which are often so much more abstract and creative than the original meanings - and there is great value in that process.

*Finally, have you had any ideas for the follow-up album yet?*

Yes, I'm working on it currently. Although I can't give too much away. I'm very excited about it and for those who've enjoyed the journey of *The Disappearance of the Girl* - there are certainly many more epic journeys to come.

Those wanting to hear some of **Phildel's** music, watch some of her videos, or who just fancy a bit of amateur stalking can find her rather wonderful page on [Facebook](#).

**Phildel** has also set up her own Street Team initiative in Germany which offers supporters exclusive previews

## The Re-Emergence of the Girl - An Interview With Phidel!

of new music, free signed merchandise and other splendidly sparkly things in exchange for your help on various »fun and creative tasks«. For those who would like to get involved please contact **Phidel** at: [info@phidel.com](mailto:info@phidel.com)

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